



OVERGROWN PATH:
The boarded-up static home. sub050609 76 01

Nobody is in a hurry to leave

Are some travellers leaving already?

The overwhelming message from the illegal side of the site is one of wanting to stay put.

There are constant claims that the majority of travellers are done travelling, that they have wanted to set down roots ever since 2003 when John Prescott gave them a two-year extension to stay.

But some clearly don't agree.

It's strange to see a static home on the legal portion of the camp boarded up and the path to its door overgrown.

Other pitches on the illegal portion have become empty.

It's a strange paradox but it appears, at Dale Farm anyway, that some travellers say permanently while others come and go as they please - but they are forthright that nobody is leaving without a fight.

Men work as women cook

What do they get up to in their daily lives?

Men at the camp are not around in the day, they do odd building jobs and, I'm reliably informed, are "jacks of all trades".

When they come home they bet against each other on the outcome of football matches.

The women go out and play bingo, get their nails done and cook up their favourite meal of bacon, spuds and carrots.

Travellers speak of determination to remain at illegal camp

'We think we should be allowed to stay'

Special report

David Arnold
email: david.arnold@
gazette.co.uk
Call: 01277 219222



"AS soon as people see someone like you walking around with a suit on, they phone each other to see what's going on, to see who you are."

I'm reliably informed by Nora Sheridan, 44, that people like me don't visit Europe's most notorious traveller camp too often.

I meet her in the legal part of Dale Farm in Crays Hill, Billericay, where, as she sucks back on yet another cigarette and drains a cup of tea, she assures me the legal and illegal sections of the camp will work together to stop any forced eviction.

"I actually live through the gate (the illegal part)," she tells me.

"I'm visiting my niece who lives on the legal part."

Fighting

"We are all family. We are all one. We are fighting together. For me there is no difference between the sites."

Niece Kathleen, 32, adds: "That's right, there's no difference between the two areas."

"We all believe in the same thing, that we should be allowed to stay and make our homes here."

In this part of Dale Farm the yards are neat, sizeable and well maintained.

Surrounded by bordering walls and pathways the look of the static homes and associated land make it feel like any housing estate in the country.

Everybody I speak to claims everyone else is family and they will fight to the death if necessary to protect their homes.



EVICTED BID: Travellers Eileen McCarthy, Sabrina McCarthy, Tina McCarthy and John McCarthy.

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However there is some conjecture and disparity when pressed on whether both halves will work together come eviction time.

It could be there is some division inside the camp and that rumours of jealousy, because half of them can stay and some can't, could mean some legally settled travellers sit by and watch their illegal neighbours thrown out.

A traveller from what they refer to as "the passed bit" approaches me.

He says he doesn't want to "rock the boat" if they are evicted and, although

he doesn't agree with it, he says he will take little involvement.

Any potential friction between the sides is not a situation that worries Marianne McCarthy, 68, who I catch up with after passing through the imposing barricade that marks the entrance to the illegal site.

"We are not jealous of them, that's not the sort of people we are. We are pleased they can stay," she tells me.

"But we know they are going to help us when it comes down to it. I know they will help us."

But she says there is no room for the some 86 illegal families, which totals 500 people, to move to the legal site.

Although rumours are rife that the camp will be fortified and thousands of travellers from other sites across the country will come and help, the eviction will come as a surprise.

Former council leader Malcolm Buckley said: "Even I don't know when the eviction will start. It will be a closely guarded secret."

One thing is for sure... it will not be easy.

Government agrees to talks over alternative sites for gipsies

BILLERICAY and Wickford MP John Baron has secured talks with the Government about finding alternative accommodation for travellers who are being evicted.

Last week in Parliament he challenged Communities Minister Sadiq Khan over the

Government's responsibility for helping Basildon council find temporary sites outside the district.

The minister has agreed to a meeting but questioned the Government's potential involvement.

In a further development

the former Secretary of State for Local Government, Hazel Blears, has admitted in a letter to Mr Baron that the travellers will have to move on.

Mr Baron said: "It is good news that, after much pressure, the Government has finally admitted that we are

right to enforce planning law at the Dale Farm site, and that the travellers should now move on."

"I hope this message will now get through to the travellers themselves."

"Planning law will be upheld, but in order to avoid the

misery of a forced eviction I have impressed on the travellers that they should move on peacefully."

"I am shortly meeting with the minister to solicit government help in identifying transit sites outside the district to facilitate this."



CONTROVERSIAL: The centre pictured at the time of its opening.

Laptop is discarded on floor

WHAT actually goes on inside the community centre?

I'm shown inside the highly controversial and much talked about St Christopher's community centre.

It was paid for through a £12,000 Essex County Council Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital funds grant but caused local outcry because it's been erected without permission on Green Belt land.

Discarded

And for all the talk of computer lessons and education classes, there is just one discarded laptop on the floor and posters ripped from the walls.

Sabrina starts to clean up.

"It's just kids," she says. "You know what they're like, it's just like any council estate really."

Messages of goodwill adorn the walls from Christmas and the Dale Farm Chavvy's board (travellers youth group) shows upcoming events.

It is also full of Roman Catholic trinkets and details of traveller history are plastered across the walls.

Husband's delight at NHS drug U-turn - p11

County Council objects to village green plans

Continued from p1

being prepared but played down any thoughts of future development.

He said: "Essex County Council is currently preparing a formal objection to the application that has been made for Sun Corner in Billericay to become a village green."

"There is no threat of development on this land, and therefore Essex County Council does not see the value of changing the designation when it is already in public ownership and therefore subject to democratic control."

The 11-acre site is used for Billericay's annual

fun fair and year-round by the town's dog walkers and picnic-goers.

Most of the land is owned by the county council apart from one acre which is the property of the district council which has a contract to maintain the entire green.

Rejection

Last year we revealed how Basildon District Council was in the throes of reversing its rejection to the plans, having initially been concerned the change of status would result in a loss of access to the public.

Cabinet member for resources, Cllr Phil Turner,

said this week: "To hear this is a bit of a blow. We want the area kept free from development and this was a chance to leave a legacy."

"What I have always been concerned about is another, less sensible, government coming in and developing the land."

"We are still in discussions to get our objections overturned."

Billericay Town Council leader Cllr Peter Bowditch said: "At this time our application is formally lodged with the county council and we have been invited to suggest a venue in Billericay by the inspector for a hearing at a date yet to be decided."

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